



Creating Safe Homes Strengthening Tribal Communities

The Newsletter for the National Indian Safe Home Coalition (NISHC) Program

Volume 1, Issue 2 – February 1998

Program History

The NISHC Program began in 1993 as a collaborative project between the Indian Health Service (IHS) and the US Fire Administration (USFA). The program's goals are to reduce fire-related deaths in Native American communities and to enhance the capacity of these communities to design, implement, manage and evaluate injury prevention programs. A national coalition of representatives from IHS, USFA, SafeKids Campaign, Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Centers for Disease Control meets semi-annually to provide guidance for the program. The four original coalitions -- Bad River, WI; Turtle Mountain, ND; Mille Lacs, MN; and Fort Totten, ND -- were funded in 1994 for three-year projects. Based on lessons learned from annual project evaluations, six new coalitions received funding in early 1997 in: Lawton, OK; Southern Ute, CO; Cochiti Pueblo, NM; Northern Cheyenne, MT; Fort Peck Tribes, MT; and Fort Berthold, ND. The six new coalitions are currently implementing fire safety initiatives in their communities and are the primary focus and audience of this newsletter.

Newsletter Well Received

In December 1997, the first issue of the NISHC Newsletter was developed and distributed. Readers found that the newsletter successfully met its intended goals: to increase communication between coalitions; to provide opportunities for coalitions to share ideas, success stories, and challenges; to increase a sense of project identity; and to create a collective learning experience. Numerous people working in injury prevention around the country have been added to the newsletter mailing list to increase awareness of the program. We encourage all readers to send any comments, suggestions, or stories to the editors below.

Site Visits Conducted

NISHC Coordinator Harold Cully traveled with Carolyn Crump, PhD and Robert Letourneau, MPH from the University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center in late February to conduct site visits of the three "northern" Safe Home Coalitions. Carolyn and Robert are on contract to IHS to conduct the on-going evaluation of the six NISHC coalitions. The general purposes of the program evaluation are: 1) to assess the development of each coalition; 2) to provide technical assistance; and 3) to introduce the coalitions to self-evaluation skills. As part of their work, Carolyn and Robert provide technical assistance, as needed, to coalitions. They are also collecting information about the usefulness of the newsletter and needs for the upcoming June training workshop. The following is a brief summary of their three recent site visits.

The *Fort Peck*, MT coalition is currently in the process of collecting fire occurrence data from four local fire departments. While they plan to use the information to tailor their interventions, initial analysis indicates the need for a youth fire safety education campaign.



Above: (l to r) Fort Peck Safe Home Coalition members Shirley Gabrielson, Elaine Boyd, Jalee Atkinson, Louis Peterson, and Michael Headdress in Poplar, Montana.

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Although experiencing delays in processing the project's funding, the *Northern Cheyenne*, MT Safe Home Coalition is planning to purchase and distribute smoke detectors (equipped with nuisance/hush buttons) to several rural reservation communities without fire intervention coverage. Pending the final processing of project funds, the coalition also plans to conduct home safety surveys in these rural communities.



Above: Northern Cheyenne Safe Home Coalition members pose for a photo in *Lame Deer* during the recent site-visit.

The site visit scheduled for the *Fort Berthold* coalition in North Dakota was cancelled due to blizzard conditions in Western North Dakota. Harold, Carolyn and Robert were able to discuss the coalition's history with former coordinator Sherry King in Bismarck, and conduct a conference call with current coalition coordinator, Cynthia Danks. The group is currently conducting home safety surveys and plans to complete data collection by April. They will then hire contractors to install smoke detectors in identified homes.

What Else Is Happening?

This section highlights activities occurring at the other three Safe Home Coalition sites:

Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico

- ◊ Installing smoke detectors and fire extinguishers to homes of elderly community members
- ◊ Completing elderly home safety surveys
- ◊ Will train community to use fire extinguishers
- ◊ Planning next phase of project activities

Lawton Service Unit, Oklahoma

- ◊ Conducting home safety surveys (25 completed)
- ◊ Entering home safety survey data in Epi Info
- ◊ Soliciting bids for smoke detectors, 10-year batteries and Velcro materials for installation purposes
- ◊ Conducted fire safety education at tribal health fairs
- ◊ Will investigate developing a brochure to market coalition activities in the community

Southern Ute Tribe, Colorado

- ◊ Conducting Epi Info analysis of 120 home surveys
- ◊ Purchased smoke detectors and fire extinguishers
- ◊ Identified which departments/agencies will install fire safety equipment in homes of elderly
- ◊ Will develop two community fire safety training classes for elderly and greater community
- ◊ Recruited five new safe home coalition members

In addition, two of the original four NISHC sites have continued to serve their communities:

The *Turtle Mountain*, ND coalition continues to collect fire safety statistics for Belcourt, North Dakota, as well as the surrounding Turtle Mountain Reservation. Fire prevention continues to be a priority for the Fire Department and the Safe Home Coalition. Fire Chief Jim Hamley stated, "*We as fire fighters and tribal members care about our neighbors and we can see fire prevention making progress in Belcourt, as we have had no fire deaths in the last 6-7 years and we can attribute a part of this to our fire safety activities. Smoke detectors do work!*"

The *Bad River*, WI coalition remains very active, meeting once a month. They have been instrumental in helping the volunteer fire department recruit new members. The success of the Safe Home Survey will continue as the coalition utilizes the survey to conduct an evaluation of their smoke detector installation activities. The coalition will hire tribal members to determine usage rates of smoke detectors installed in homes that were a part of the original Safe Home Coalition Program grant. Project coordinator Eugene Bigboy indicated that the tribe saw a need for this life-saving effort: "*We had several fire deaths that occurred in trailer homes on the reservation and from this, the community felt we needed to bring more awareness to fire safety to Bad River and the surrounding communities.*"

Workshop Announcement

In June 1998, a training workshop tentatively titled "Strengthening a Safe Home Coalition" will be held in Rapid City, South Dakota (likely dates will be June 16-17 with final confirmation to be announced in the next newsletter). Current Safe Home Coalitions are encouraged to use Project Year II funds to send up to five members to this training workshop. Carolyn Crump and Robert Letourneau will be involved with the development of the training. A trainer/consultant will also be hired to conduct the 2-day workshop. Carolyn

and Robert have assessed each coalition's training needs to prepare the training workshop content. Tentative workshop topics include:

- ◊ Marketing your coalition to the local community
- ◊ Communicating coalition success stories
- ◊ Choosing/Distributing fire safety equipment
- ◊ Finding/Using/Adapting fire safety educational and training materials for your community
- ◊ Sustaining a Safe Home Coalition – now and after funding discontinues

If your coalition would like to have other issues addressed or discussed at the workshop, please contact Carolyn or Robert at 919-966-5598. Subsequent NISHC newsletters will provide additional information about the training workshop, including content and logistics.

Sustaining Your Coalition

Some coalitions are experiencing difficulty in sustaining their coalition as the program approaches its second year. One possible way to sustain a coalition is to plan well organized meetings. The more efficient a coalition meeting is, the more likely that coalition members will continue their involvement with the group. The purpose of a coalition meeting is to share ideas, generate enthusiasm and solve problems together. Based on their experiences working with coalitions, Carolyn and Robert offer the following suggestions on how to conduct more efficient coalition meetings:

- Select and maintain a regular meeting schedule
- Prepare and circulate agendas for each meeting
- Start and end meetings on time
- Start each meeting by reviewing the agenda
- Conduct introductions of participants
- Maintain a list of action steps generated at each meeting, including the names of people agreeing to complete them
- Provide meeting minutes/summaries to those who could not attend a meeting to keep them abreast of activities taking place each month
- Regularly encourage new community members to join the group; recruitment is an on-going process

If you have any additions on how your coalition conducts effective meetings, please send them to the editors and they will be included in future issues.

Please send us your success stories!

Coalitions Within Coalitions

Related to the issue of sustaining your coalition, all of the current Safe Home Coalitions operate and function within pre-existing injury prevention coalitions. This is a hallmark of the NISHC program, as it promotes capacity building at the community and tribal level. If a coalition is to sustain itself over time (i.e. after funding ends), it is very beneficial to have an existing coalition infrastructure in place, from which future projects and activities can be pursued, administered, and evaluated.

Working as part of an existing injury prevention coalition offers some unique learning opportunities and benefits for all coalition members (safe home or other). This type of arrangement, where the larger coalition is often represented by a broader spectrum of community members, can: 1) enhance participation in Safe Home Coalition activities; 2) increase knowledge of fire prevention and safety; and 3) influence "getting the word out to the community" about your coalition's activities. All of these benefits can lead to greater success of the NISHC Program.

This type of organizational arrangement can also present some unique challenges. For example, working with members of the larger coalition not particularly interested in or aware of fire prevention and safety issues in your community may require your Safe Home Coalition to "sell" itself and the importance of fire prevention internally. This arrangement can also affect how the larger coalition sets objectives and priorities for the distribution of coalition resources, particularly limited financial and human resources required to complete SHC activities.

Please send us the challenges and success stories your coalition has experienced working within a larger, existing injury prevention organizational structure. We'd like to share your experiences with others.



Above: The remains of a house fire in Poplar, Montana highlight the need for Safe Home Coalitions.

Data Collection

Data collection is an important part of any project's activities. Many coalitions are involved with collecting home safety data to tailor their project's interventions. In fact, many are using a home safety survey originally developed by the Bad River Coalition in Wisconsin as a model for their data collection efforts. This type of data collection is an important first step. It is also important, however, for coalitions to collect fire-related injury and death data. Doing so and later presenting this data can highlight how effective your coalition has been at achieving its goals. It can also be used as the basis for future coalition activities and funding proposals. Please let us know if you have questions about data collection.

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Focus On....Education

Since many coalitions are in the process of procuring and installing fire safety equipment such as smoke detectors, the importance of educating community members in their use cannot be understated. One educational approach being used by Marvin Lovato of the Cochiti Pueblo coalition is to educate and inform family members about the importance of changing batteries for smoke detectors. Marvin tells community members to change their smoke detector batteries every time they change their clocks forward in the spring and back in the fall. Please send us ideas on how your coalition is planning to educate community members on the proper use and maintenance of their new home fire safety equipment.



About This Newsletter

This newsletter is produced for the joint National Indian Safe Home Coalition Program of the Indian Health Service Injury Prevention Program and the United States Fire Administration. It is edited by Robert J. Letourneau, MPH, of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Injury Prevention Research Center and Harold Cully, Oklahoma City Area Indian Health Service Injury Prevention Specialist. If you have questions, comments or story ideas, please submit them using the enclosed Fax Transmittal Form. We encourage all readers to comment on the newsletter.



Above: John Sery, Barry Bolar and Robert Letourneau pose for a photo with employees of the Northern Cheyenne Board of Health in Lame Deer, Montana.